

Indigenous Education Update archive (2013-2016)

Volume 1
Number 1 *Indigenous Education Update 1 -
March 2013*

Article 1

3-2013

Indigenous Education Update 1 - March 2013

Follow this and additional works at: <https://research.acer.edu.au/indigupd>

Recommended Citation

(2013, March 01). Indigenous Education Update 1 - March 2013. *Indigenous Education Update archive (2013-2016)*. 1(1) <https://research.acer.edu.au/indigupd/vol1/iss1/1>

This Journal Article is brought to you by the Indigenous Education at ACEReSearch. It has been accepted for inclusion in Indigenous Education Update archive (2013-2016) by an authorized administrator of ACEReSearch. For more information, please contact repository@acer.edu.au.

Indigenous Education UPDATE

Edition 1 March 2013

INSIDE...

Latest research

- NT schools pilot early-years literacy and numeracy online test 2
- Call for strengths-based approach to school readiness 3
- Reporting Indigenous outcomes 4
- Higher education enrolment soars 5
- Sporting Chance program gets thumbs up 5

Featured resources

- Two Way Teaching and Learning 6
- Supporting Indigenous mental health 6
- A learning ground: Indigenous Education Research Database 7

Revisiting the research

- ACER Research Conference 2011 – Lessons learned 8

In profile

- Stephanie Armstrong
Indigenous Research Fellow 10

ACER Advisory Committee on Indigenous Education

- Message from the Chair 11
- About the committee 11

ACER Overview 12

Improving Indigenous learning

Welcome to the first issue of ACER's *Indigenous Education Update*. This newsletter gives you an insight into the work that we undertake in research and development in Indigenous education.

ACER is committed to improving learning across the life span and has identified the improvement of outcomes for Indigenous learners as an organisational priority. ACER recognises the importance of respecting Indigenous peoples and their cultures, and that this is an important part of developing a culturally conscious workplace for its employees. ACER's program of research in Indigenous education is informed by its Advisory Committee on Indigenous Education (ACIE) comprising prominent Indigenous educationists and academics from the States and Territories. Lyn Riley, Chair of ACIE, provides commentary about the role of the committee in this newsletter.

ACER has contributed in many areas related to Indigenous education and continues to enhance its reputation as an organisation that provides

products and services underpinned by an evidence base. In this issue we illustrate the work we have been doing in the Northern Territory with digital technology, report on Indigenous participation levels in higher education, reflect on the learning from our annual research conference on Indigenous transitions, review the usefulness of the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) report, showcase our publications and give you the opportunity to explore our 'one-stop-shop' Indigenous Education Research Database. We also illustrate the key findings from the evaluation of the Sporting Chance program and show how a strength-based approach to the home-to-school transition is valuable for improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous learners. The newsletter also profiles ACER's Aboriginal Researcher, Stephanie Armstrong, and the work that she is doing in Indigenous education.

We look forward to keeping you up to date with our work to improve Indigenous learning.

Gina Milgate
Indigenous Liaison Officer

To learn more about ACER's
Indigenous Education services,
visit www.acer.edu.au/indigenous



Latest research

2

NT schools pilot early-years literacy and numeracy online test

Danielle Anzai reports on an innovative computer-based early-years literacy and numeracy assessment that puts young Indigenous learners at the controls.

ACER has developed a computer-based monitoring and assessment tool for the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (DET) that will be used to assess Year 1 students' literacy and numeracy skills from this year.

While other computer-based assessments for early years do exist, they generally involve one-to-one administration by teachers. The ACER assessment pioneers an approach where early years students independently interact with the program by navigating the site, tackling the questions and recording their own responses.

Research shows that children, including those from Indigenous backgrounds, engage strongly with technology. They enjoy the independence and interactivity

of using computers and computer games, even with software that does not reflect their own backgrounds.

However, in commissioning the assessment, DET was very clear that it should feel local and familiar, and reflect the students' context. The assessment features remote scenery and bush images, and one of the texts has an Indigenous family as the main characters and is read by an Indigenous voice actor.

The assessment's audio features enable standardised delivery to all students, with every instruction and question available as an audio and text option. Instructions were recorded by professional voice actors, including former *Blue Heelers* actor and current teacher Julie Nihill, who were directed to give emphasis to intonation where the question's intent requires. Students can listen to the instruction as many times as they need to, which saves the teacher reading the same text over and over again.

Due to the autonomous nature of the assessment, students are less likely to feel pressure when they realize they have made a mistake. Inclusion of

an Undo button enables easy self-correction, allowing students to feel less like they are being assessed and reducing performance anxiety that can be created in other test environments.

ACER will also deliver a practice program so that students can familiarise themselves with the navigation prior to the trial test. At the suggestion of former ACER Advisory Committee on Indigenous Education member Dr Grace Sarra, students will be able to engage with the practice program year-round, in order to become comfortable with the technology, style and language.

ACER piloted the assessment in several Northern Territory schools, including a remote Indigenous school in West Arnhem Land, in May 2012. Feedback from the pilot indicated that the young learners enjoyed the assessment and were able to navigate the computer-based materials. The teachers who participated were enthusiastic about the potential of the tool to inform their own planning.

A larger trial of the assessment took place at the end of 2012, and will reveal important information about this new form of testing including how well Indigenous and other six-year-olds cope with multiple-choice questions and how well they can work independently on computers.

ACER worked in consultation with Indigenous educators in the Northern Territory throughout the development of the assessment. While the assessment is by no means perfect for Indigenous learners, it is a step in the right direction, and the information gathered by it will help inform what to do next.

Danielle Anzai is a Research Fellow in ACER's Assessment and Reporting research program.



ACER Research Fellows Sandra Knowles and Danielle Anzai in West Arnhem Land

Latest research

3

Call for strengths-based approach to school readiness

A new paper highlights the need for a strengths-based approach to school readiness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, in order to recognise the skills, cultural knowledge and understanding they already have when they transition to formal learning. The authors – Michele Lonsdale, Stephanie Armstrong, Sarah Buckley and Gina Milgate – explain.



There is a continual message of gaps, failures and 'lack' when examining the school readiness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This is a deficit approach that focuses on what these children cannot do in comparison with other children.

In search of a more positive approach, ACER and the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) reviewed the literature and conducted a strength-based analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) to examine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's abilities and knowledge at 4-6 years of age.

School readiness is as much about schools recognising the existing capabilities and knowledge that children have when they arrive at school as it is about supporting children and families to become ready for formal learning. Some of the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children identified in the literature include being independent from an early age, having well-developed visual-spatial and motor

skills, and having the capacity to self-judge and to take risks.

Resilience is critical for successful transitions from home to school, as children who possess the resilience attributes of social competence, autonomy, mastery, optimism and problem-solving skills are better able to adapt and learn.

The study confirms that family support, strong cultural identity, good health, positive self-identity and engaging in shared activities such as storytelling are likely to lead to resilience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Furthermore, responses of LSIC parents and carers show the critical importance of family and connections to land and culture in developing children who are resilient.

But while LSIC shows strong and rich interactions between children and their parents and carers, and shows the importance of cultural knowledge and identity in the development of resilience, these factors are not currently being reflected in testing and checklists used to measure children's wellbeing and school readiness.

The research advocates the use of a strengths-based approach to support children as they make the transition from home to school. Among other

things, such an approach would involve developing appropriate assessments in which children can experience success, show what they can do, learn from what they cannot yet do and grow in confidence.

A strengths-based approach to school readiness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children means building on the resilience of these children, their families and communities. It also means developing resources and providing professional learning opportunities to support schools in identifying the knowledge and abilities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring with them.

The full report, *Starting School: A strengths-based approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, is available from research.acer.edu.au/indigenous_education

Dr Michele Lonsdale was a Principal Research Fellow in ACER's Policy Analysis and Program Evaluation research program. **Stephanie Armstrong** is an Indigenous Research Fellow in the same program. **Sarah Buckley** is a Research Fellow in ACER's National Surveys research program. **Gina Milgate** is ACER's Indigenous Liaison Officer.

Latest research

4

Reporting Indigenous outcomes

An ACER review of a national report on the key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage has found the report would benefit from a stronger focus on Indigenous strengths and achievements. Adrian Beavis explains.

In April 2002, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commissioned the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision to produce an *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* (OID) report to ascertain whether or not policies and programs are achieving positive outcomes for Indigenous people. After five editions of the report the Steering Committee engaged ACER in 2012 to assess the usability and usefulness of the report and make recommendations for improvements.

Consultation with the widest possible range of stakeholders who were known to be users of, or contributors to, the *OID* report revealed a variety of views. The report was generally considered to be meeting its purpose in reporting on the performance of Australian governments in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. However, a proliferation of other government performance reports in recent years has led to some stakeholders questioning the relevance of the *OID* report.

ACER found that, while there is some overlap with other government performance reports, there are also two key features that make the *OID* report unique among these other reports: its focus on outcomes and its whole-of-government perspective.

The *OID* report was found to reflect international 'best practice' in several respects, most notably in its reporting against specific targets. Key strengths of the report included the breadth of the information provided, time series analyses, clear identification of progress towards reaching targets, information around successful initiatives, and differentiated provision of information to meet the needs of a variety of users.

The most commonly identified limitations were around the reporting of data, the need for greater analysis of the interconnections between indicators, and the need for a more strengths-based approach in the reporting of Indigenous experience. This latter finding highlights an inherent tension between the purpose of the *OID* report – which reports on an explicitly endorsed COAG 'Closing the Gap' agenda – and a desire on the part of a significant number of stakeholders for a more positive report that recognises achievements, strengths and the positive dimensions of Indigenous experience.

The consultations provided a range of practical suggestions for improving the quality, reach and usefulness of the *OID* report, such as the inclusion of evidence-based case studies and reporting on sub-groups within the Indigenous population.

Importantly, ACER recommended that the Steering Committee examine ways in which information about Indigenous strengths such as connectedness to land and country, resilience, Indigenous leadership and language can be incorporated to help shift the balance of the report from a negative focus on disadvantage

to a more positive focus on overcoming this disadvantage.

While the *OID* report is used in a variety of ways, ACER's review suggests there is limited use of the report among Indigenous stakeholders. ACER therefore recommended that the Steering Committee investigate further the reasons for the apparently low level of use by Indigenous Australians, with a view to adjusting the *OID* report to better accommodate their policy and research needs, and that they increase the level of Indigenous representation on the *OID* Working Group and publish the membership of the *OID* Working Group in the *OID* report to raise awareness of this group among stakeholders.

The full report, *Review of the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators report*, is available from www.pc.gov.au/gsp/indigenous/oid-review-2012

Dr Adrian Beavis is ACER's Policy Analysis and Program Evaluation Research Director.



Latest research

5

Higher education enrolment soars

The number of Indigenous students enrolled at Australian universities has grown by over 40 per cent over the past five years, but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remain under-represented at Australian universities, according to an ACER analysis of Census data.

A recent ACER *Joining the Dots* research briefing analysed information from the 2011 Census, released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in August 2012, to provide insight into the characteristics of Australian university students and how they have changed since the previous Census and in the first decade of the 21st century.

The analysis, by ACER Principal Research Fellow Dr Daniel Edwards and ACER Research Fellow Ms Eva van der Brugge, revealed there was a notable increase in the number of Indigenous

students between 2006 and 2011 (from 7057 students to 10 128 students), with enrolments growing by about 43 per cent. This growth was significantly larger than the overall growth in the number of students in higher education in Australia, which increased by 25 per cent between 2006 and 2011.

However, Edwards and van der Brugge note that Indigenous students are still considerably underrepresented in Australian higher education. While Indigenous people made up 2.5 per cent of the Australian population in 2011, only 1.09 per cent of university students were Indigenous.

Joining the Dots is a subscription-based resource provided by ACER to those with an interest in Australian higher education. Details for subscriptions are available at www.acer.edu.au/jtd or by emailing jtd@acer.edu.au



Sporting Chance program receives thumbs up

An evaluation of the national Sporting Chance program has identified a number of critical success factors associated with the program that have contributed to improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

ACER was commissioned to see if the program was achieving its objective of using school-based Sports Academies and Education Engagement Strategies to improve educational outcomes, particularly in relation to attendance, engagement, learning achievement, staying on at school, and improving the level of parent and community involvement in school.

Feedback from students in the Sports Academies indicated improved

levels of confidence and pride from developing new skills, having leadership opportunities, participating in team activities and undertaking other activities in a culturally safe environment. Students participating in the Education Engagement Strategies benefited from being exposed to a range of role models and activities.

Overwhelmingly, the feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who participated in the evaluation was positive, particularly in relation to their attitudes to school, self-identity and self pride in being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; and self-efficacy as learners.

The full evaluation report by a team of ACER researchers led by Dr Michele Lonsdale is available from research.acer.edu.au/policy_analysis_misc/14

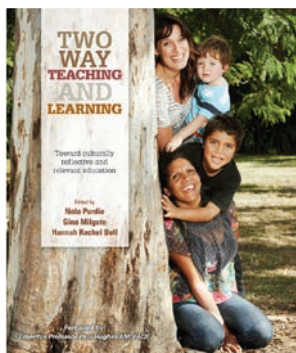


Featured resources

6

From the ACER bookshop:

Two Way Teaching and Learning



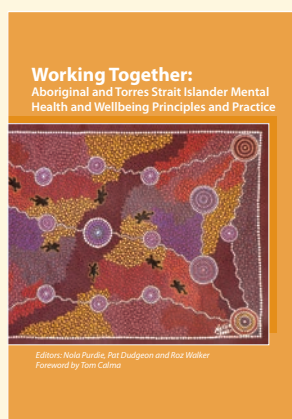
In *Two Way Teaching and Learning: Towards culturally reflective and relevant education*, co-editors Hannah Rachel Bell, ACER Principal Research Fellow Dr Nola Purdie and ACER Indigenous Liaison Officer Gina Milgate highlight the overriding need for Australian people and educational systems to better engage with communities and Elders in order to address the underlying issues that face Indigenous people from socially and culturally diverse backgrounds.

Two Way Teaching and Learning was officially launched at the annual ACER Research Conference in Darwin on 7 August 2011. The conference, on the theme 'Indigenous Education: Pathways to success', was a fitting place to launch the book, which focuses on policy issues, strategies to improve outcomes for Indigenous students, and ways in which people of different cultures can learn from each other.

Two Way Teaching and Learning is published by ACER Press. Print copies can be purchased from the ACER Online Shop shop.acer.edu.au/acer-shop/product/A5207BK or by contacting customer service on ph. 1800 338 402.

From ACER and partners:

Supporting Indigenous mental health



A unique text from ACER provides valuable cultural awareness information and practical resources in support of Indigenous mental health. At the time of its release in 2010, *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice*, was the first book of its kind.

ACER produced the book under contract to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health) in partnership with Kulunga Research Network. It forms part of the Commonwealth's Government's commitment to mental health.

According to co-editor, ACER Principal Research Fellow Dr Nola Purdie, a set of resources dedicated to Indigenous mental health had been long awaited.

The book looks in depth at mental health issues that have hit Indigenous communities particularly hard including suicide, alcohol and other substance abuse, anxiety in young Aboriginal people, trauma, family violence and prenatal mental health. The important issue of appropriate

mental health assessments is also carefully addressed.

Previously unpublished models for mental health treatments and an Aboriginal model of healing are included. Other resources have been drawn from Beyond Blue.

The book is intended for practitioners and mental health workers as well as students training to be mental health workers. It is available free of charge from a website or in print copy by order.

Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice, edited by Nola Purdie, Pat Dudgeon and Roz Walker with a foreword by Tom Calma was funded by the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, Commonwealth Government Department of Health and Ageing, and was developed by ACER and the Kulunga Research Network, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.

The book is available in hard copy or as a free download from aboriginal.childhealthresearch.org.au/kulunga-research-network/working-together.aspx

Featured resources

7

From ACER's Cunningham Library:

A learning ground: Indigenous Education Research Database



Educators with an interest in improving outcomes for Indigenous learners are now able to access the latest relevant national and international research all at one destination, following the launch of the Indigenous Education Research Database (IERD).

IERD is a 'learning ground' where everyone can locate the most up-to-date research in Indigenous education. More than a repository, the database is an interactive online community where Indigenous scholars and others in the educational research community can connect and share research, and Indigenous knowledges and methodologies.

The database contains details of more than 8000 books, articles, conference papers and reports on various aspects of Indigenous education from publishers in Australia and overseas. IERD also includes links to more than 116 journals and newsletters on Indigenous education, as well as links to relevant organisations, publishers and websites.

IERD was created and is maintained by staff of ACER's Cunningham Library, in consultation with ACER's Indigenous Liaison Officer. Established to provide researchers and educators with a single destination for the latest Indigenous education research, the database is an example of ACER's commitment to improving outcomes for Indigenous learners.

Material in the database is drawn from the Australian Education Index (also produced by staff of ACER's Cunningham Library) with additional

material sourced from a variety of international organisations and publishers. Updated monthly, articles are selected and indexed by qualified librarians. New additions to the database can be followed on twitter @indedres

Access to IERD is free via www.acer.edu.au/ierd

IERD at a glance

- A gateway to the latest national and international evidence-based research focusing on Indigenous education.
- Access to the most up-to-date research on Indigenous education.
- A 'first stop' for post-graduate students undertaking research in Indigenous education.
- Research spans early childhood, post-school education and adult learning.
- Includes Indigenous education issues such as cultural diversity, parent and community engagement, wellbeing, identity and oral language.
- A place for scholars to disseminate their work to the national and international Indigenous education community.

Recent additions

de Boehmle, Tara. **Walking in two worlds. *Independent Education* n.1 p.8-10, 2012. ISSN: 1320-9825**

Abstract: What might be learned if we listened more deeply? Why should we seek additional means to share our stories? And how can our application of the curriculum respect cultural knowledge and acknowledge students who walk in two worlds? Ngarigo/Gunnai woman, Dr Doris Paton, shares her experience of establishing the Woolum Bellum KODE (Koorie Open Door

Education) School in Morwell Vic and the Bataluk Curriculum.

Aveling, Nado. **Indigenous studies: a matter of social justice; a matter of urgency. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* v.6 n.2 p.99-114, April-June 2012. Refereed article. Includes bibliographical references. ISSN: 1559-5692 EISSN: 1559-5706**

Abstract: Despite the evidence to support the fact that if students and their cultures are not acknowledged, they tend to be less engaged in schooling than those students whose cultures are presented as the norm. Indigenous studies are apt to be at the margins of the curriculum. In this article, therefore, a case is made for teaching Indigenous studies through a comparison of the author's home state of Western Australia with Montana - one of the few states in the United States to have mandated the teaching of Indian culture and history and to tease out lessons that could be learned because the teaching of Indigenous studies is a matter of social justice; indeed, it is a matter of urgency. [Author abstract]

Jorgensen, Robyn. **Enhancing educational performance for remote Aboriginal Australians: what is the impact of attendance on performance? *Education 3-13* v.40 n.1 p.19-34, February 2012. Refereed article. Includes bibliographical references. Special themed issue : Australian Insights ISSN: 0300-4279 EISSN: 1475-7575**

Abstract: This article discusses the issues confronting education providers in remote areas in relation to quality education provision. Issues around teacher quality, retention of staff, quality of service provision, leadership and community involvement have been recognised as significant factors in addressing the gap. However, a key issue that remains contentious is attendance. There is a strong link between attendance and performance. Attendance, and its impact on education provision, is discussed at length with recommendations for policy and practice provided. The article draws on the author's experiences in two sites - one in the Kimberley region of Western Australia and the other in the Central Desert areas of the Northern Territory. [Author abstract, ed]

Revisiting the research

8

ACER Research Conference 2011 – Lessons learned

ACER Research Conference 2011, on the theme *Indigenous Education: Pathways to success*, brought together experts in Indigenous cultures, education, early childhood, health and government policy, with the aim of working together to support Indigenous learning.

Over two days, four keynote speakers and 12 speakers at concurrent sessions presented research-based knowledge about the environmental conditions, pedagogical strategies and curriculum approaches that create pathways to success for Indigenous students.

Eight key learnings emerged from the conference

1. An evidence-based approach is critical

Professor Jeannie Herbert (Charles Sturt University) noted that it is through heeding the outcomes of research that we as a nation can achieve sustainable education outcomes for Indigenous students. Professor Herbert said research is a means of enabling participants to empower themselves for their own futures.

Jonathan Carapetis and Sven Silburn (Menzies School of Health Research) told delegates that the limited progress in improving educational outcomes can, in part, be attributed to instructional practices derived from the unconnected experience of thousands of individual teachers, each 're-inventing the wheel' and failing to adapt their practices in the light of cumulative scientific evidence about 'what works'. They suggest that, as contextual factors will influence 'what works', it is necessary to aggregate results from a range of different evaluations through systematic reviews in order to produce reliable and comprehensive evidence.

2. Indigenous research should recognise the value of learning from the Indigenous community

Using an Indigenous storytelling methodology, Professor Lorna Williams (University of Victoria, Canada) told delegates that the community is a key support for the educational success of Indigenous learners.

Professor John Lester (University of Newcastle) suggested that the implementation of a community mentoring strategy would support the teaching profession to improve the teaching process for Indigenous students.

Dr Grace Sarra (Queensland University of Technology) discussed an example of a program that values Indigenous communities. Building and maintaining strong community-school partnerships, and acknowledging, embracing and developing Indigenous leadership in schools and school communities, are key elements to the approach of 'YuMi Deadly Maths'.

3. 'Success' of Indigenous students should be defined

Professor Jeannie Herbert (Charles Sturt University) told delegates that education providers need to acknowledge each learner's personal agency in defining 'success' within the parameters of their own values and beliefs systems. Therefore, defining success is a matter for negotiation between the learner and the other interested party.

Georgie Nutton (Menzies School of Health Research) noted that while definitions of success in the early years have traditionally focused on literacy and numeracy, there has been work over the last two decades to shift the balance to incorporate measures of the

competencies in early years known to contribute to school engagement and retention.

Professor Jill Milroy (University of Western Australia) told delegates it is asserted that educational success for Aboriginal students is about high achievement in western education systems while maintaining Aboriginal identity and cultural connection. She said the difficulty with this is that the two aims have never really coincided and most often they actually pull against each other.

4. Researchers should be aware of the impact of the 21st century on Indigenous education

Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney (Adelaide University) identified information and communication technology as one of the four key education areas of 21st century Indigenous education: alongside mathematics, science and Aboriginal languages. He argued that, if Indigenous Australian societies are to move forward, then schools have a responsibility not only to close the gap, but also to develop in students a deep understanding of technologies. Professor Rigney said teachers, governments and policy makers must re-think the state of Indigenous education now to bridge any future digital divide. This includes understanding what schools will look like in the 21st century and the role that technology will play, as well as understanding what Indigenous pathways are in the 21st century.

5. There is a maze of pathways which comprise of learners, teachers and learning

Justin Brown and Gina Milgate (ACER) noted that there are several key transition points in young people's

Revisiting the research

9

lives – the early schooling years, transition to post-compulsory schooling, transition to tertiary education (VET and higher education) outside school, re-engagement with education and training, and transition to employment from education and training. They said support must be provided at each transition point in order to achieve successful pathways for young Indigenous people, with programs and initiatives built on a bedrock of embedded cultural awareness and understanding.

6. *There is a recognised need to research absenteeism and the measurement of non-attendance for Indigenous students*

Dr Kate Reid (ACER), in her analysis of the Longitudinal Literacy and Numeracy Study for Indigenous Students, noted that higher levels of student absenteeism were associated with lower achievement in literacy and numeracy. She said that promoting attendance among Indigenous students is one of the key aspects of closing the gap in educational achievement for Indigenous students.

Dr Sarah Buckley and Stephanie Armstrong (ACER) told delegates that a combination of family, community, school and individual factors are involved in students' missing school, although the causes of non-attendance are contested. They noted that different methods for recording student attendance across the states and territories mean it is difficult to collect, collate and compare information on school attendance at the national level. Buckley and Armstrong said that, while there is sufficient data to indicate a gap between non-Indigenous and Indigenous school attendance rates, it is not currently possible to tell if the gap has increased or decreased over time, nor is it possible to show if there are pockets where gaps are less pronounced or non-existent.

Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney (Adelaide University) said that

measurement of non-attendance needs careful consideration. Given there is currently only limited evidence-based theory about Indigenous absenteeism, he identified the need for the development of a system of recording absenteeism.

7. *The health of Indigenous learners should be acknowledged*

Jonathan Carapetis and Sven Silburn (Menzies School of Health Research) noted that the direct and indirect links between health and education have long been recognised, with almost all developing countries showing a linear relationship between increasing levels of education of parents and rates of infant mortality.

Dr Sarah Buckley and Stephanie Armstrong (ACER) noted that student health is an important factor in school attendance and retention.

8. *Indigenous ways of teaching and learning should be recognised.*

Professor Jill Milroy (University of Western Australia) told delegates that

Indigenous ways of knowing are integral to Indigenous student success and to cultural continuity for Indigenous communities, yet scant resources are allocated to sustain them.

Associate Professor John Bradley (Monash University) discussed the importance of all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, being exposed to 'other' knowledge systems, in order that they can engage in cross-cultural discourse in their future working lives.

Professor Lorna Williams (University of Victoria, Canada) advised that educators need to experience Indigenous ways of learning and teaching to understand what they can do to incorporate these practices into their classes. She said education systems should incorporate Indigenous ways of learning and teaching, such as songs and stories, and should reconsider attitudes to time and assessment practices that exclude Indigenous ways of learning.



In profile

10

Stephanie Armstrong Indigenous Research Fellow

Stephanie Armstrong, a Gamilaraay woman from Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay Country (northwest NSW), joined ACER in 2010 as Indigenous Liaison Officer and now works across several projects as an Indigenous Research Fellow.

Stephanie has over 30 years' experience in education, having worked in early childhood, primary, secondary and further education settings, within schools, universities, government and not-for-profit organisations.

'Teaching has been a great career choice. I have been lucky enough to have worked across Australia with many wonderful people. Over the last 15 years I have had a number of opportunities to work nationally and internationally, leading discussions and workshops that guide and support as well as challenge,' says Stephanie.

'As a Gamilaraay woman, with a long history of working within Aboriginal education I have learnt many things that have helped me to advocate for equitable outcomes in education for First Australian children. This responsibility is not only important but one I take seriously.'

Stephanie describes the move to ACER as a change of direction from the classroom to research. Part of this change involved commencing a Masters of Education by Research last year, with ACER's support. Stephanie's research topic – using a strengths-based approach when working with Aboriginal

children attending Prep in Victoria – reflects her interests in early childhood education and how educators need to build on the strengths of children and seek interventions that are tailored for each First Australian child.

Since joining ACER, Stephanie has worked closely with ACER's Indigenous Liaison Officer, Gina Milgate, and has helped to strengthen the organisation's principles for working with Indigenous communities. She has also received a Fellowship in 2013 to work with young Aboriginal women in Year 11 and 12 who are seeking to enter the health professions in Victoria.

Stephanie says her colleagues at ACER have supported her to gain skills and confidence in research, and have provided opportunities for her to share her knowledge and understandings.

'Listening and respecting other ways of seeing the world and working within research is vital to the way I operate, therefore working in pairs or small teams has produced both respectful and new practices at ACER,' says Stephanie.

Stephanie co-authored a chapter in the 2011 ACER Press book, *Two Way Teaching and Learning: Towards culturally reflective and relevant education*. In the chapter, titled 'Talking the Talk: The soft tissue of reconciliation', Stephanie and her co-author Denise Shillinglaw explore the meaning of reconciliation as they experience it in their friendship, and the depth of appreciation for each other's way of thinking, speaking and being that it has generated.

Stephanie believes that education plays a vital part in reconciliation. It is her aspiration for Indigenous education

that the voices of First Australian peoples, and their ways of working, are listened to and everyone is respectful of the diversity and strengths that First Australians bring.

'I am determined to continue to challenge as well as to provide the support necessary to influence change so that educational policy, practices and the workforce engage with First Australians in lifelong learning,' says Stephanie.

'I believe we have so much more to learn about First Peoples and the knowledge and learning they hold not only within Australia but within other parts of the world.

'We need to keep the conversation going.'



Stephanie Armstrong with Mia Sloman
(Photograph from *Two Way Teaching and Learning* © ACER Press 2011)

ACER Advisory Committee on Indigenous Education



Message from the Chair

There is no doubt that there are still major gaps

in educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and that these exist from early childhood right through to higher education.

A key to identifying the factors that contribute to the complexity of issues for Aboriginal education is the type of research that is undertaken. For instance, it is often the case that research in Aboriginal education is based on the interests of the researcher and on their own understanding and skills. Instead, the starting point needs to be on identifying the needs of Aboriginal

people for gaining sound educational outcomes.

The goals of the ACER Advisory Committee on Indigenous Education are twofold.

First, the Committee seeks to develop appropriate engagement processes for the level and type of participation by Aboriginal people in research. This can range from Aboriginal people identifying what research needs to be undertaken, through to giving advice on the development and implementation of research projects.

Second, the Committee works with ACER's expert staff to identify the

type of research and publications that are required to enhance Aboriginal education and improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners. It is the Committee's hope that this newsletter is useful in sharing current research and knowledge on Aboriginal education.

Through the partnership of ACER and the Committee, major achievements in Aboriginal education research have already been made; however, there is still much to do together.

Lynette Riley

Chair, ACER Advisory Committee on Indigenous Education

About the committee

The Advisory Committee on Indigenous Education (ACIE) provides expert advice on strategic directions for educational research and on ways of enhancing the value and impact of ACER's research.

The specific brief of the Committee is to provide members of the Board and senior management with expert advice on:

- the areas of Indigenous education most in need of research;
- ways in which ACER expertise can be put to best use in these areas;
- emerging research opportunities;
- groups of individuals with whom it may be useful to make contact or collaborate in research;
- possible sources of research funding to achieve these objectives;
- ways of enhancing the organisation's research capabilities - including

suggestions for strategic research partnerships; and

- how ACER research finding might best be disseminated to have greatest impact.

The Committee is comprised of people with direct experience and expertise in the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Members have been chosen to ensure wide state and territory representation, as well as representation from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

Committee Members

Mrs Clair Andersen, Director, Indigenous Higher Education, University of Tasmania

Professor John Lester, Director, Academic & Research, University of Newcastle

Professor Jeannie Herbert, Foundation Professor of Indigenous Studies, Charles Sturt University

Mrs Jillian Miller, Portfolio Leader, Indigenous Student Services, University of South Australia, David Unaipon College

Ms Lynette Riley (Committee Chair), Senior Lecturer, University of Sydney

Dr Grace Sarra, Senior Lecturer, School of Cultural Studies, QUT Caboolture Campus

Mr Steve Goodwin, Branch Manager, Indigenous Programs Branch, Indigenous Group, Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations

Professor Colleen Hayward, Head, Kurongkurl Katitjin Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research, Edith Cowan University

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) is an independent not-for-profit organisation. ACER's mission is to create and promote research-based knowledge, products and services that can be used to improve learning across the life span.

ACER is involved in the collection, analysis, interpretation and use of reliable information to assist educational decision makers – from individual teachers to system leaders and policy makers – in two ways: to help them help learners by identifying educational progress and challenges, and to help them identify and implement effective policies and practices on the basis of good evidence.

ACER was established in 1930 and has since built a strong reputation as a provider of reliable support and expertise to education policy makers and professional practitioners. As a not-for-profit organisation, independent of government, ACER receives no direct financial support and generates its entire income through contracted research and development projects and through products and services that it develops and distributes.

ACER has experienced significant growth in recent years and now has more than 340 staff located in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Dubai and New Delhi. In 2012, 122 of ACER's staff held Masters Degrees, 63 held Doctorates, and 120 held a teaching qualification.

Statement of Commitment

ACER is committed to improving learning across the life span and has identified the improvement of outcomes for Indigenous learners as an organisational priority. ACER recognises the importance of respecting Indigenous peoples and their cultures in its work in Indigenous education. ACER understands that this is an important part of developing a culturally conscious workplace for its employees.

Organisational Goals

ACER provides assistance in data gathering and action planning in four major areas of educational practice:

1. Learners and their Needs

Identifying, understanding and addressing the needs of Indigenous learners.

2. The Learning Profession

Enhancing and assessing the capacity of teachers and leaders to improve outcomes for Indigenous learners.

3. Places of Learning

Creating more supportive and effective places and modes of learning for Indigenous learners.

4. A Learning Society

Supporting and monitoring systemic and government efforts to close gaps in life expectancy and educational achievement for Indigenous learners.

The ACER *Indigenous Education Update* is published by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). Editorial support by Megan Robinson.

t 03 9277 5555
f 03 9277 5500
e indigenous.education@acer.edu.au
w www.acer.edu.au/indigenous

Subscribe to this newsletter at
www.acer.edu.au/indigenous

ISSN: 2201-5930
Copyright © 2013 ACER

Stay connected with ACER

